

NICARAGUA/U.S. PALMER: Good evening. Tom Brokaw continues in China. In the news tonight, the CIA's secret war in Central America became a little less secret today. Intelligence sources in Washington say the CIA has provided anti-Sandinista rebels with planes used in bombing raids inside Nicaragua, and Nicaraguan government troops say they fired a Soviet-made heat-seeking missile to shoot down a cargo plane delivering supplies to the rebels. Nicaragua claims that plane was on a CIA-sponsored mission. More on this from Bonnie Anderson reporting tonight from Nicaragua.

ANDERSON: The DC-3 cargo plane crashed in a remote mountainous region 90 miles northeast of Managua. Counter-revolutionaries based in Honduras say mechanical problems forced it down, but the Sandinistas claim the U.S.-registered plane was shot down by anti-aircraft artillery as it dropped supplies to rebels. They say four tons of food, medicine, and ammunition were recovered. The Sandinistas say this plane took off from a Honduran airstrip recently upgraded with the help of U.S. money. Further proof, they say, of American support for the counter-revolutionaries. One by one, the three crewmen captured after the crash were presented to reporters under the watchful eyes of Sandinista officers. They claim they were trained and financed by the CIA. One crewman even identified by name people he says are CIA agents in Honduras; a Colonel "Raymond, a man named Mark, a Mr. West, a Miss Kimberly. This incident comes less than a month after a twin-engine plane bombed the airport in Managua and then crashed into the tower, killing the two pilots. The Sandinistas immediately blamed the airport attack on the CIA but offered no proof. However, reports out of Washington now say the light plane was one of several provided to the counter-revolutionaries by the CIA. While the Reagan administration's so-called covert war has been no secret for months, events like these are raising further questions about the scope of U.S.-sponsored activities against the Sandinista government. Bonnie Anderson, NBC News, Los Cedros, Nicaragua.

PALMER: For months it's been an open secret that the CIA has been spending millions of dollars to aid rebels opposed to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, but now there are reports from Nicaragua that despite all that money and advice, the rebels aren't doing very well, as Fred Francis reports tonight in this Nightly News Backgrounder.

NICARAGUA/U.S. FRANCIS: Victorious Nicaraguan troops in Ocotal in the northern mountains. Last week they beat back the CIA's rebel army in the first major battle in five months. After two years and \$40 million, diplomats say the CIA's war has so far been a disaster. These two rebel commanders, fatigued and demoralized, told of the defeat at Ocotal--of running out of ammunition, about supply lines breaking down. They said the ammunition and the rifles exist. 'I don't know if there was something wrong with supply planes or if the gringos are holding back help; like maybe they want to do another Bay of Pigs.' Ocotal was a bitter

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disappointment after a summer of reorganization. NBC News has learned that four months ago the CIA rebel army teetered on the edge of collapse largely because of this man, *Pedro Pablo Orteza, known as Commandante Suicide. All CIA guns and ammunition were cut off. Almost the entire CIA-trained army, 6,000 men, was ordered to fall back into Honduras because of Orteza. He controlled a third of the rebel army, and he was out of control. He became a rogue elephant who refused to follow orders. He was finally trapped in the mountains of Nicaragua by other rebel commanders. He has been in prison and his men reassigned. In Honduras yesterday, Adolfo *Coletto, the most powerful rebel leader, confirmed that Orteza is being held.

COLETTA: We wanted to make sure that we run a disciplined army even if it's a volunteer army. We cannot afford to have people going on their own.

FRANCIS: The renegades had been confined to this camp near *Los Troyes, Honduras, 500 yards from the Nicaraguan border. They wait in a rain forest for rebel politicians and the CIA to decide their fate. They are disillusioned and bitter. They have been ordered to get in step or they are finished. They will lose their weapons and be banished. This man, *Rolando Paul, says the rebel leaders are losing the war through ignorance. PAUL: Ask us, one of them, if, if they know the mountains of Nicaragua. They don't know.

FRANCIS: Yes, there have been big problems, the leaders admit, but they dismiss these guerrillas as a handful of troublemakers. The leaders insist morale is high, even at this clandestine rebel hospital outside the Honduran capital. There are 100 wounded here. A senior rebel leader said there will be many more in the next six months. 'Because,' he said, 'we have only that much time to prove to the CIA and our own men that we can win.' Fred Francis, NBC News, Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

PALMER: CIA officials in Washington, when asked about U.S. involvement in Central America and reports that the CIA is providing planes to the rebels... Well, they replied as they always do, 'It is not our policy to comment on such allegations.'